

An application of AUA to examining the potential washback of a new test of English for university entrance

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Background: criticisms ①

Current English college entrance exams involve only *reading, translating, grammar, and listening*.

College entrance exams need to be changed to promote *more balanced English teaching and learning at high school*.

System of holding college entrance exams just once a year involves too much mental and physical stress for students.

Feedback from *college entrance exams* consists of *only pass/fail* information.

Japan Foundation of Corporate Executives (2013)



Background: criticisms ②

Function of college entrance exams for selection purposes is in decline.

Need to switch to tasks which require more integrative skills

Need to use tests such as TOEFL to promote 'globally minded people'

Need feedback which can be used also for diagnostic purposes

The Central Education Council (2013)



Background: recommendations ③

The test must encourage students to learn basic content

The test must be criterion rather than norm referenced

The test must address the basic content of each subject

The test must be administered multiple times a year

Sasaki (2012)

Test of English for Academic Purposes (TEAP) is intended to evaluate the preparedness of high school students to understand and use English when taking part in typical learning activities at Japanese universities.

TEAP liaison council (2013)

TEAP features:

- 4 skills
- Tasks derived from target language use domain of Japanese university learning
- Multiple administrations
- More detailed feedback on performance for test takers



Background: accountability ⑤

In the real world of language assessment, it is becoming increasingly important, and in many cases mandatory, for test developers and users to be accountable to stakeholders.

Being accountable, or accountability, means being able to demonstrate to stakeholders that the intended **uses** of our assessment are justified.

Bachman and Palmer (2010)

A recurrent argument for entrance test reform is that better tests will encourage intended forms of English teaching and learning in Japanese high schools: **positive washback**.



Background : validation ⑥

Validity is a matter of degree, and it may change over time as the interpretations/uses develop and as new evidence accumulates.

Validity is not a property of the test. Rather, it is a property of the proposed interpretations and uses of the test scores.

To validate an interpretation or use of test scores is to evaluate the plausibility of the claims based on the test scores.

Kane (2013)

BUT **use** of a test involves more than interpretation and use of scores: **washback on teaching and learning**



Background: AUA ⑦

Assessment Use Argument (AUA) guides the assessment development process.

An AUA thus provides a framework for investigating the extent to which the intended use of a particular assessment is, in fact, justified.

Bachman and Palmer (2010)

Use of a good college entrance testing system should encourage intended forms of teaching and learning.

We should judge such a test's quality partly on this basis.



Background: AUA ⑧

The process outlined within the argument-based approach is basically quite simple. First, state the claims that are being made in a proposed interpretation or use, and second, evaluate these claims.

Kane (2013)

What claims do we want to be able to make concerning the washback of TEAP?

What kinds of teaching and learning **should** be encouraged?



Background: AUA ⑨

There is a clear need for validation of a test at both the *a priori* and the *a posteriori* stages of development, implementation, scoring and evaluation.

Weir (2005)

Develop an interpretive argument for a test that can be justified with respect to the test's design before it has been administered for its intended purposes.

Evaluate the interpretive argument for the test's uses after it has been administered for its intended purposes.

Briggs (2004)



Washback

Washback is...

- associated both with the **design** of a test and its **use**
- **highly variable** – individuals react to tests differently
- +/- **intense** – some participants are affected more than others
- **complex** – test influences interact with a web of other factors
- a mesh of both **positive** (beneficial, intended) and **negative** (damaging, unintended) effects

If we can predict likely washback effects, we may be able to intervene to promote the positive and limit the negative

Green (2007)



Purpose of the study

Through an AUA, evaluate the potential washback of TEAP on teaching and learning of English for college entrance examinations in Japan.

Claim: Washback will result from the use of TEAP and this will be beneficial for teaching and learning at Japanese high schools.

(A priori) data: Responses to questionnaire survey



Methods ①

Method: Anonymous questionnaire survey
(Yes/No and six-point Likert scale responses)

Period: September to October 2012

Stakeholders:

- ① English lecturers at a university in Tokyo (N = 19)
- ② 3rd year students at high schools (75) affiliated with the university (N = 3,868)
- ③ English teachers at these high schools (N = 423)



Methods ②

- A: Perceptions of university study and the English language skills required at university
- B: Current practices in Japanese high school English classes
- C: The washback effects of the current university entrance exams
- D: Predicted effects of changes to the content of university entrance exams
- E: Perceptions of the innovative features of TEAP

Results ①

A) Perceptions of university study and English language skills required at university

Q	HSS	HST	UT	Questionnaire Items
23	94.1	97.7	94.7	Do you think that knowledge of vocabulary and word usage is important when taking English classes at university?
24	96.7	99.0	100.0	Do you think that the ability to comprehend the main ideas of English reading texts is important when taking English classes at university?
25	90.0	96.0	100.0	Do you think that the ability to accurately comprehend the details of English reading texts is important when taking English classes at university?
26	92.0	96.0	89.5	Do think that the ability to comprehend graphs and charts, etc., in English is important when taking English classes at university?
27	96.4	98.4	100.0	Do you think that the ability to understand the main ideas in conversations or lectures in which English is used is important when taking English classes at university?
28	92.9	96.7	100.0	Do you think that the ability to comprehend accurately the details of conversations and lectures in English is important when taking English classes at university?
29	92.8	98.1	100.0	Do you think that the ability to ask questions and take part in discussions in English is important when taking English classes at university?
30	91.5	96.2	94.7	Do you think the ability to express your own opinions in English about social issues is important when taking English classes at university?
31	89.5	97.9	100.0	Do you think that the ability to write a summary in English of the main ideas in an English text is important when taking English classes at university?
32	77.6	94.8	94.7	Do you think that the ability to write an essay in English by integrating information from multiple English texts is important when taking English classes at university?
33	90.8	97.6	100.0	Do you think that English ability is useful when taking classes for subjects other than English at university (e.g., in order to read reference materials or search the internet when gathering information for class, etc.)

Stakeholders mostly agree that the English skills required for TEAP are important for study at university.

Results ②

B) Current practices in Japanese high school English classes

Q		HSS	HST	UT	Questionnaire Items
1		83.4	92.4	–	Does your school have special lessons or study programs designed to prepare students for university entrance exams?
2	R	84.6	98.2	–	(If you answered “yes” to No. 1, please respond to No. 2. You may circle more than one response to this question.) Which of the following four skills do the lessons or programs focus on?
	L	61.5	66.5	–	
	W	79.4	78.0	–	
	S	21.7	26.6	–	
3	R	67.2	91.0	–	(If you circled more than 1 response to No. 2, please respond to No. 3. Only circle ONE response to this question.) The greatest amount of time in the lessons or study programs is devoted to which of the following four skills?
	L	5.5	3.0	–	
	W	20.9	4.9	–	
	S	2.2	0.3	–	
4	R	69.5	87.4	–	In your school English classes, the greatest amount of time is devoted to which of the following four skills?
	L	4.5	3.1	–	
	W	20.2	6.7	–	
	S	3.9	2.8	–	
5	R	61.8	–	–	Which of the following four skills do you focus on the most in your English studies?
	L	5.0	–	–	
	W	27.5	–	–	
	S	6.0	–	–	

Teaching and learning at high school is currently focused mainly on reading, writing and less focused on listening and speaking.

Results ③

C) Washback effects of current university entrance exams

Q	HSS	HST	UT	Questionnaire Items
6	83.0	97.0	78.9	In general do you think that the kind of test items used in university English entrance exams has an influence on high school English classes in Japan?
7	84.6	–	–	Do you think the kind of test items used in the University English entrance exams you plan to take influence the way you study English?
12	89.0	98.9	94.7	Do you think that the perceived value of a high school in Japanese society is influenced by the number of its graduates who enter university?
21	78.6	88.4	78.9	Do you think that the English ability acquired through studying for entrance exams will be useful for taking English classes at university?

Number of high school graduates progressing to college affects the status of a school: entrance tests are high stakes for schools as well as students.

Results ④

D) Effects of changes to the content of university entrance exams

Q	HSS	HST	UT	Questionnaire Items
8	89.9	95.7	78.9	Do you think that the inclusion of a speaking test in university English entrance exams would lead to an increase in speaking activities in high school English classes in Japan?
9	90.2	–	–	Do you think that the inclusion of a speaking test in the university English entrance exams you plan to take would lead to an increase in the amount of time you spend studying speaking?
10	92.8	98.2	78.9	Do you think that the inclusion of a writing test in university English entrance exams would lead to an increase in writing activities in high school English classes in Japan?
11	93.6	–	–	Do you think that the inclusion of a writing test in the university English entrance exams you plan to take would lead to an increase in the amount of time you spend studying writing?

Teaching and learning at high school thought likely to change if the college entrance exams make speaking and writing mandatory.

Results ⑤

E) Perceptions of the innovative features of TEAP

Q	HSS	HST	UT	Questionnaire Items
13	85.7	82.7	68.4	Do you think that universities should disclose information about the structure of their entrance exams (e.g. test item formats, number of items, etc.) prior to administration?
14	83.2	74.4	73.7	Do you think that universities should maintain the same structure of their entrance exams (e.g. test item formats, number of items, etc.) from year to year ?
15	90.4	79.3	78.9	Do you think it would be a good thing to have a system in which students could submit the results from a single entrance exam to multiple universities?
16	78.6	58.9	63.2	Do you think that administering university entrance exams several times a year would be a good thing?
17	91.7	88.6	89.5	Do you think that testing only reading is sufficient for university English entrance exams?
18	72.2	88.3	100.0	Do you think that university English entrance exams should include a listening test?
19	51.6	71.0	73.7	Do you think that university English entrance exams should include a speaking test?
20	75.6	92.0	94.7	Do you think that university English entrance exams should include a writing test?
22	84.3	82.4	78.9	Do you think it would be a good thing for university English entrance exams to provide some kind of feedback to individual test takers regarding their English ability (e.g. a test score or advice for improving learning)?

Degree of agreement varies: evidence for resistance to change



Conclusions: AUA

Claim

Washback will result from the use of TEAP and this will be beneficial for teaching and learning at Japanese high schools.

Datum

1. Proportion of graduates progressing to college from a high school believed to affect high school status and so likely to impact on teaching and learning.
2. Teaching and learning at high school is currently focused mainly on reading with less attention on writing and speaking.
3. Teaching and learning at high school thought likely to change if the college entrance exams make speaking and writing mandatory.

(BUT there is some evidence of possible sources of resistance to change)

Warrant The number of graduates progressing to college affects the social reputation of Japanese high schools and there will be pressure to adapt to innovations in testing.

If four skills are required in the college entrance exams, teaching and learning should come to include greater balance across skills.



Directions for further research

1. Investigate actual teaching and learning undertaken at high schools for each skill in preparation for college entrance exams: compare with stated intentions.
2. Investigate reasons for variation in attitudes and practices among stakeholders relating to the inclusion of each skill on the college entrance exams: seek strategies for encouraging intended practices.
3. Explore the contribution of strategies other than test design (e.g. training for teachers) to test preparation practices.



Thank you for your attention.

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